

Cincture Cords

It is a pious practice to wear a cord or cincture in honor of a Saint for the purpose of devotion, to gain graces and blessings, and to keep in mind some special grace or favor which one hopes to obtain through the intercession the one honored by the cord. Among peoples from the East, and especially among the Jews, whose priests and prophets wore a cincture, the wearing of a belt or girdle dates back to very ancient times. Christ himself commanded his Apostles to have their loins girded. In the early Church virgins wore a cincture as a sign and emblem of purity, and hence it has always been considered a symbol of chastity as well as of mortification and humility. For the virtues of chastity and purity cinctures should be worn around the waist, but specifically for the virtue of obedience cords may be worn sash-style across the shoulder.

The wearing of a cord or cincture as a sacramental for devotion is thus of very ancient origin. Cinctures form a part of monastic habits and clerical vestments, and starting in the Middle Ages cinctures were also worn by the faithful in honor of Saints out of personal devotion, though at the time no confraternities were formally established. Later on, ecclesiastical authority took up the prerogative of approving cinctures, setting apart special formulae for the blessing of these devotional cords, and set up official archconfraternities and confraternities whose members wear a cord or cincture. As these confraternities were dissolved or decreased in importance, the faculties to bless and invest in a cincture were relegated to all priests. If one ever loses their cord, they will need to get another one blessed, as unlike a scapular, one is not strictly speaking “invested” in a cincture. There have been many cincture cords available throughout history for the faithful to wear both officially promoted and out of personal devotion to some Saint or religious mystery. Those officially approved or still widely known are described below:

St. Philomena Cord

St. Philomena was an early martyr of the Church, whose existence was forgotten for a long time. However, her remains were discovered in the catacombs of Rome marked with early Christian symbols for virginity and martyrdom. Because of the countless favors obtained through the intercession of St. Philomena, called the Wonderworker, her devotees wished to place themselves under her protection. The faithful thus often wore a blessed cord in her honor, to be protected in times of need. The wonderful fruits and innumerable graces obtained through this custom spread St. Philomena's fame.

The Cure of Ars, St. John Vianney, who had so many times experienced the power of the Saint, loved to see the faithful wear the

precious cord. He had often blessed St. Philomena cords for her devotees. This devotion was practiced not only to obtain healing for the body, but above all, as a way to defend one's soul against all impurity. In the same way, St. Philomena will preserve chaste and pure from many dangers those who honor her purity by wearing her blessed cord. Pope Leo XIII blessed and approved the Cord and attached many privileges and indulgences to the wearing of it. The Cord is a sign of devotion to St. Philomena and an "action prayer" of petition seeking to honor her, and gain through her intercession health of body and protection of soul.

St. Philomena Cords are white and red and are to be made of either linen, wool or cotton threads crocheted together in chain stitch as to give an almost equal preponderance to the two colors which represent virginity and martyrdom. At one end there are two knots in honor of her Virginity and Martyrdom. It is worn underneath clothes like a belt. The cord is both a symbol and a prayer. It is a symbol because with it we intend to bind ourselves to St. Philomena with sincere devotion. It is a prayer because in wearing it we pray to St. Philomena to protect us in every moment of our lives. The purposes of this devotion are to obtain, through the intercession of St. Philomena, the means adequate to conserve purity in conformity with our own situation, to combat increasing unbelief and to reinforce oneself in the spirit of our faith, to profess a special love for St. Philomena, and deserve her protection and intercession.

In putting on the Cord we should commit to constantly honoring St. Philomena in order to merit her protection against all evils of soul and body and also to obtain through her intercession perfect chastity and the spirit of faith, of which she is a wonderful model. All the baptized are called to chastity and virtue in Christ, the model of all chastity and virtue. Through devotion to St. Philomena and the Blessed Mother, to whom are denied nothing, the faithful may gain the virtues of faith, the purity of virginity, charity, and the generosity of martyrdom. One should say this prayer daily:

"O St. Philomena, glorious Martyr of Faith and Purity, grant me the same strength of mind that enabled you to resist the most terrible assaults; grant me your ardent love for Jesus Christ which the most atrocious tortures were not able to extinguish, so that, by wearing your Cord and imitating you on earth, I will be incoronated with you in heaven. Amen. St. John Vianney, pray for us."

If one is seriously ill, this prayer may be added when wearing the Cord of St. Philomena to pray for recovery:

"Oh unvanquished Martyr Saint Philomena, you who have endured many cruel tortures for Jesus Christ, grant me the patience to bear

this sickness, and if it be God's will, let me, wearing the Cord, blessed in your name, recover good health so that I can vigorously work towards the consecration of my soul. Amen."

Cord Worn in Honor of Our Lord Jesus Christ

A blessing is given in the traditional Roman Ritual for a cord to be worn in honor of Jesus Christ. This cord may either be worn perpetually out of devotion, or may be part of a set of vestments worn by a priest for Mass. Jesus was bound by rough cords on his way to Calvary, and this cord should remind us of this and help us to mortify our flesh and to contemplate the Passion He suffered for our sake.

St. Michael Cord

The wearing of a cord in honor of St. Michael the Archangel was general throughout France at one point. Although before the time of officially approved cinctures, at one period in history it was probably the most well known. For personal devotion one may, if they so wish, wear a cord in honor of St. Michael and the Holy Angels, perhaps with nine knots in honor of the Choirs of Angels. It could be used to invoke St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. Raphael, and one's Guardian Angel, as well as the choirs of Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels and Angels.

St. Joseph Cord

St. Joseph was the spouse and chaste guardian of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and thus the foster father of God Incarnate in Jesus. He is invoked as a powerful Saint and protector of the Church. The miraculous cure of an Augustinian nun at Antwerp in 1657 from a grievous illness, through the wearing of a cord in honor of St. Joseph gave rise to the pious practice of wearing it to obtain the grace of purity through his intercession. This is a white cord with seven knots at one end, and only one at the other end to keep it from unraveling. It is worn to honor and implore Saint Joseph and for the virtues of chastity, mortification, and humility among other things. It should be blessed by a priest. Graces obtained by the wearing of this cord include St. Joseph's special protection, purity of soul, the grace of chastity, final perseverance, and particular assistance at the hour of death. Each day, the seven knots should be prayed on in honor of the seven joys and seven sorrows of St. Joseph. One who wears this cord must say 7 Glory Be's daily; a longer meditation on St. Joseph's joys and sorrows would be fitting:

1. O chaste Spouse of Mary most holy, glorious St. Joseph, great was the trouble and anguish of thy heart when thou were minded to put away privately thine inviolate Spouse, yet thy joy was unspeakable when the surpassing mystery of the Incarnation was made known to thee by the Angel! By this sorrow and this joy, we beseech thee to

comfort our souls, both now and in the sorrows of our final hour, with the joy of a good life and a holy death after the pattern of thine own, in the arms of Jesus and Mary.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be . . .

2. O most blessed Patriarch, glorious St. Joseph, who was chosen to be the foster father of the Word made flesh, thy sorrow at seeing the Child Jesus born in such poverty was suddenly changed into heavenly exultation when thou didst hear the angelic hymn and beheld the glories of that resplendent night. By this sorrow and this joy, we implore thee to obtain for us the grace to pass over from life's pathway to hear the angelic songs of praise, and to rejoice in the shining splendor of celestial glory.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be . . .

3. O glorious St. Joseph, thou faithfully obeyed the law of God, and thy heart was pierced at the sight of the Precious Blood that was shed by the Infant Savior during His Circumcision, but the Name of Jesus gave thee new life and filled thee with quiet joy. By this sorrow and this joy, obtain for us the grace to be freed from all sin during life, and to die rejoicing, with the Holy Name of Jesus in our hearts and on our lips.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be . . .

4. O most faithful Saint who shared the mysteries of our Redemption, glorious St. Joseph, the prophecy of Simeon regarding the sufferings of Jesus and Mary caused thee to shudder with mortal dread, but at the same time filled thee with a blessed joy for the salvation and glorious Resurrection which, he foretold, would be attained by many souls. By this sorrow and this joy, obtain for us that we may be among the countless number of those, who through merits of Jesus and the intercession of Mary the Virgin Mother, are predestined to a glorious resurrection.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be . . .

5. O most watchful Guardian of the Incarnate Son of God, glorious St. Joseph, what toil was thine in supporting and waiting upon the Son of the most high God, especially in the flight into Egypt! Yet at the same time, how thou didst rejoice to have always near you God Himself, and to see the Egyptian idols fall prostrate to the ground before Him. By this sorrow and this joy, obtain for us the grace of keeping ourselves in safety from the infernal tyrant, especially by flight from dangerous occasions; may every idol of earthly affection fall from our hearts; may we be wholly employed in serving Jesus and Mary, and for them alone may we live and happily die.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be . . .

6. *O glorious St. Joseph, an angel on earth, thou didst marvel to see the King of Heaven obedient to thy commands, but thy consolation in bringing Jesus out of the land of Egypt was troubled by the fear of Archelaus; nevertheless, being assured by the Angel, thou dwelt in gladness at Nazareth with Jesus and Mary. By this sorrow and this joy, obtain for us that our hearts may be delivered from harmful fears, so that we may rejoice in peace of conscience and may live safely with Jesus and Mary and, like thee, die in their company.*

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be . . .

7. *O glorious St. Joseph, pattern of all holiness, when thou didst lose, through no fault of thine own, the Child Jesus, thou sought Him sorrowing for the space of three days, until with great joy, thou didst find Him again in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors. By this sorrow and this joy, we supplicate thee, with our hearts upon our lips, to keep us from ever having the misfortune to lose Jesus through mortal sin; but if this supreme misfortune should befall us, grant that we may seek Him with unceasing sorrow until we find Him again, ready to show us His great mercy, especially at the hour of death; so that we may pass over to enjoy His presence in Heaven; and there in company with thee, may we sing the praises of His Divine mercy forever.*

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be . . .

“And Jesus Himself was beginning about the age of thirty, being (as it was supposed) the Son of Joseph.”

Pray for us, O holy Joseph, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Let us pray. O God, Who in Thine ineffable Providence didst vouchsafe to choose Blessed Joseph to be the spouse of Thy most holy Mother, grant we beseech Thee, that he whom we venerate as our protector on earth may be our intercessor in Heaven. Who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

“Guardian of virgins, and holy father Joseph, to whose faithful custody Christ Jesus, Innocence itself, and Mary, Virgin of virgins, were committed; I pray and beseech thee, by these dear pledges, Jesus and Mary, that through the wearing of this cord in your honor, I may be preserved from all uncleanness, and may with spotless mind, pure heart, and chaste body, ever serve Jesus and Mary most chastely all the days of my life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen”

The Cord of St. Francis of Paula

This white wool cord is worn to honor and seek the intercession of the hermit St. Francis of Paula (or “de Paola”). He is a powerful example of humility and sanctity. His parents had a great devotion to St. Francis of Assisi, and it was through his intercession that young

Francis's eye was cured when he was a baby. At the age of thirteen, being admonished by a vision, he entered a Franciscan convent for a year to fulfill the vow his parents made in return for the healing. Here he gave great edification by his love of prayer and mortification, his profound humility, and his prompt obedience. After the year was up, he went on a pilgrimage to Assisi, Rome, and other holy sites. Returning to Paula he selected a retired spot on his father's estate, and there lived in solitude; but later on he found a more retired dwelling in a cave on the sea coast. Here he remained alone for about six years giving himself to prayer and mortification.

Blessing of this cord was formerly reserved to the Order of Minims, which was founded by St. Francis de Paola. His disciples observed perpetual abstinence and lived in great poverty, but the distinguishing mark of the order was humility. They were to seek to live unknown and hidden from the world. Francis had an extraordinary gift of prophecy and discernment of consciences. The Saint was admired by several French kings and advised them from time to time, but he was no respecter of persons of whatever rank or position. He died a holy, religious death. This cord is worn to honor St. Francis of Paula and to help live out humbly the virtues he so espoused.

Black Belt of Our Lady of Consolation

The earliest devotional cord is probably the black leathern belt of Our Lady of Consolation. It is also called the Black Belt of St. Monica, St. Augustine, and St. Nicholas of Tolentino. According to tradition St. Monica in a vision received a black leathern belt from the Blessed Virgin, who assured the holy widow that she would take under her special protection all those who wore it in her honor. And St. Ambrose is said to have girded St. Augustine with it at the latter's Baptism. After the canonization of St. Nicholas of Tolentino it came into general use among the faithful.

Those who wear it are obliged to recite daily thirteen Our Father's and Hail Mary's, and a Hail Holy Queen. They must also fast on the Vigil of St. Augustine, August 27th, which under the new calendar also happens to be the feast of St. Monica.

Cord of St. Thomas Aquinas

The Cord of St. Thomas took its start from the incident in his life when the Angelic Doctor resisted a temptation to impurity. As a reward angels girded him with a cord that protected him against all such temptations in the future. To obtain a similar grace of purity, the Church has approved the cord of St. Thomas Aquinas. To gain the associated graces, one must wear a cord with fifteen knots, blessed by the assigned formula, and recite daily fifteen Hail Mary's in honor of St. Thomas.

That the Faithful may be persuaded the more eagerly to enroll in the so-called Angelic Militia founded under the patronage of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Holy See granted members the privilege of wearing instead of a cord, a medal impressed on the obverse with a picture of St. Thomas and the angels surrounding him with a girdle and on the reverse a picture of Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary. Wearing this cord fittingly honors this great Dominican theologian and Doctor of the Church.

Precious Blood Cord

Sashes or cinctures of the Precious Blood are worn to honor in a special way the Blood shed during the Passion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The cords are to be made of wool dyed red, and may take either the form of a cord worn tied around the waist or (usually by women) as a sash worn hanging on the left shoulder. The Precious Blood is the Blood of our Divine Savior, Jesus Christ. At the Last Supper, He ascribes to it the same life-giving power that belongs to His flesh in the Eucharist. The Apostles, St. Peter, St. John, and above all St. Paul, regard the Blood of Christ as synonymous with His Passion and Death, the source of our redemption.

The Precious Blood is a part of the Sacred Humanity and hypostatically united to the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity. The blood shed during the triduum of the Passion therefore was reunited to the body of Christ at the Resurrection, and thus united to the Eternal Word deserves the adoration of latria. Like the Heart or the Wounds from which it flowed, it may be singled out for special honor, in the way that special honor was rendered it from the beginning by St. Paul and the Fathers who so eloquently praised its redeeming virtue and rested on it the Christian spirit of self-sacrifice.

Cord of St. Francis of Assisi

After his conversion, St. Francis girded himself with a rough cord in memory of the cords with which Christ had been bound during His Passion, and a white girdle with three knots came subsequently to form part of the Franciscan habit. St. Francis was a great lover of nature, and this cord symbolizes the bridle of a subdued animal, for this is how St. Francis considered the body in relation to the mind. St. Dominic received the cord from St. Francis and always wore it under his habit out of devotion to the saint, his example being followed by many of the faithful.

The cord of St. Francis of Assisi follows this same tradition. One wears the cord in honor of St. Francis and as a special devotion to the Passion of Christ. The cord available to the laity has three knots in honor of the Evangelical Counsels of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. This is different from the cord of the Third Order Franciscans, which has five knots in honor of the Five Holy Wounds and which is worn with a Third Order small scapular. The Franciscan cord is the most

well known of the cords, and historically is the most widely worn, circling the globe.